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ABSTRACT

Important contributors to significant changes occurring worldwide are: the emergence of a global economy; substantial political and social change; new transmigration; and enormous technological development. The effects of these changes on cultural values, both at small community and national levels, are far reaching. National boundaries are no longer impervious to sophisticated communications media. This paper looks at some of the social implications of these changes and explores the connectedness of leisure activity to cultural values. It raises issues such as the role of media, the effect of the new technology, changes in people's expectations and social values, and the new spirit of self-determination that is sweeping marginalized communities large and small around the world. The paper seeks to raise questions about the future and suggests ways of monitoring and controlling the decisions people make that affect fundamental qualities of life. (Author/JD)

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ABSTRACT:

"THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF LEISURE ACTIVITY AND CULTURAL VALUES"

There are significant changes occuring worldwide. Important contributors to these are -
* the emergence of a global economy
* substantial political and social change
* new transmigration
* enormous technological development.

The effects on cultural values, both at small community and national levels are far reaching. National boundaries are no longer impervious to sophisticated communications and media.

This paper looks at some of the social implications of these changes and explores the connectedness of leisure activity to cultural values. It raises issues such as the role of media, the effect of the new technology, changes in people's expectations and social values and the new spirit of self determination that is sweeping marginalised communities large and small around the world.

The paper seeks to raise questions about the future and suggest ways that we might monitor and control decisions we make that affect fundamental qualities of life.

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THE INTERDEPENDANCE OF LEISURE ACTIVITY AND CULTURAL VALUES

Leisure activity can be viewed as activities taking place in a persons free (non working)time, for means of refreshment or diversion and include participation in artistic , sport or communities activity such as pottery, basketry, fibre making, card playing, fishing, bushwalking, gardening, cricket, tennis and golf.(So long as the activity is not the principal income facilitating a persons mode of living.)

There have been many attempts at an analysis of Australian values. Generally these reflect a degree of subjectivity and more importantly but less obviously, the motives of the researcher.
Australia is pictured as the lucky country, a nation of happy-go-lucky gamblers who take as their democratic right, ownership of house and quarter acre block and a steady, full-time job. In their own country and abroad, they have a reputation for enjoying their wine and beer, their outdoor recreation,for giving every one a "fair go", and are lauded for their sporting prowess, hospitality and their barbeques.

Much of this is true, but of course it is not the whole picture and that picture is changing rapidly.
It is perhaps through these changes that we can see more clearly the relationship of cultural values to leisure activity; changes to one being reflected by or correlating to changes in the other.
To illustrate this we can look at some of the many contributing factors which are themselves indicators of social and cultural change today:-

* level of unemployment (but still around 7%).
* ratio of full-time employment to part-time work.
* working hours, improving working conditions.
* geographic mobility of society.
* changes in marriage/family patterns.
* increasing percentage of single supporting parents.
* womens liberation- access to more career paths.
  - support in their self detirmination.
* a rapidly 'ageing population', brought about by increasing life expectancy and smaller families, all contributing to an average population age that is older. In both numerical and percentae terms this means there is a larger social group who will be retired from the 'work force'.
* a harsher economic climate as Australia lowers protective trading practices and joins the world economy. In Australia this has contributed to - higher interest rates.
  -stiffer means testing criteria for qualification/eligibility for social service benefits.
* greater cultural diversity in the population make-up, affecting patterns of dress, religious activity/belief systems, eating patterns, the diversty of arts practice and appreciation and other recreational practices .

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The popular myths of what is Australian, have changed. One can reflect on the Reshs Beer advertisements of the 30's and 40's, pub art as it was called, which linked the social aspects of drinking with a variety of social and often specifically sporting pursuits.(Mostly of Anglo-saxon or European heritage.)
These advertisements promoted Australian sporting heroes and heroines and in doing so created an archetypal Australian. The media continues to perpetuate and develop those myths, building the Australian ideal, more for the purposes of manipulating and maintaining our consumer based economy, than for questionning and promoting the debate on our social evolution.
Current media ownership gives a strong indication of what bias or direction this controlling influence will continue with in the future.
Of course all this affects our daily lives. It may result in a change in smoking, drinking, driving habits our holiday activities; or diet and our body consciousness. It affects the way we 'image' ourselves, the way we want to look and act. Ultimately the influence of the media can extend to the values and ideals that we as a social group adhere to.
The influence can also be positive, alerting us to hazards and provoking social responsility, such as in the massive information dissemination programs concerning 'Aids',or promoting debate on the environment.

There is no denyimg the power of the media. Our fears of media monopolies, the power of corporate giants and so on are all to often materialised. Political debate on mechanisms for controlling ownership is continuing. Our cultural values being so completely entwined in the web of economic,political and religious practices have been dramatically affected by recent fluctuations and changes in all these areas.
At the recreation end, we can see obvious changes right across the social spectrum.In the case of youth over the past few decades, there has been changes in the nature and diversity of recreation activities, but these continue to reflect fundamental social patterns and the very composition of our society.The activities reflect young persons social needs; adolescent display,search for identity,concerns for the future, competitive responses to and within the 'system', and where these needs are not being met or even acknowledged have more dramatic results,sometimes realised in forms of rebellious behaviour. The signatures of the many unresolved or uncatered for needs of our youth are all too evident in the grafitti and other "public art"/vandalism that abounds today.
Recreational resources and activities made available today by governments and other agencies are attempts to remedy a social crisis. Perhaps this is too strong a word in some peoples minds, but if we look at the factors contributing to

the dislocated and at times costly and destructive behaviour of many young people, it becomes clear that our society is changing. Changing dramatically its values and that this is affecting the very fibre of interpersonnal relationships and the bonding of communities.

* there is an increasing number of homeless young people.
* an increase in single parent families.
* serious drug and alcohol abuse among youth.

The complexity of the social change affects everyone.

* Higher education opportunities are producing a new generation of competitive young adults, with their own career paths mapped out.
* Activities have changed and new technologies bring changes not only to the workface but to the qulity of life and hence to our recreational pursuits.
* Time spent in leisure increases: in some instances meaning a shorter working day, for others more part-time work.
* Public consciousness of social issues is increasing: becoming broader and more informed(albeit through the media):exemplified by the proliferation of debate and discussion on such issues as: equal opportunity, cultural democracy and exploitation of the earth's resources.In the latter example, public response ranges from doom and gloom hopelesness to a responsible ,sustainable development approach highlighting the diversity of attitudes and philosophies that will need to resolve to acknowledge and accept their differences, for Australian society to survive and evolve successfully into the next century.

These are but a few aspects of a complex social situation. Of course change is just as evident in every sector of our society, however one breaks it up- age, wealth, geographical locality etc.

However it is interesting to look at the connections the "social context" has on recreation /leisure activity and hence by implication the way cultural values emerging out of this social context are linked to or affect the leisure aspect of our lives. This is. in fact. the basis for this paper. As we do this , it is important not to lose sight of how vulnerable to manipulation and control our leisure time(and the nature of that activity) is to media, political and economic forces. Racial and religious issues have been used in politics to detirmine what sport occurs within which national boundaries, who climbs particular mountains, or walks, camps or is permited into particular parks and so on. At the most simplistic level wealth determines affordability and hence access to a wide range of sporting and leisure activities; expensive ones such as gliding,sailing, windsurfing, formula 1 car racing are the province of a few. Wealth also determines the spectator from the participant. In the past political,economic, philosophical and religious concerns and beliefs have detirmined the appropriateness of participation within different cultures.In many parts of the world this is still fact. It is fascinating to look at the

affects of modernisation and technological change upon cultures that are or have been politically strongly united or commited to a particular belief system. One only has to look to South East Asia and China for examples. In the case of China, the alternating opening to and relaxing of restrictions to Western technology and influence, by the various Chinese leaderships, reflects the dilemma of one country questionning the worthwhileness of Western values against the communism of its recent past.

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT SITUATION

There is a complex interdependence of market forces and social values constantly acting on the members of most societies in the world today. The picture differs markedly around the globe. These forces shape the individual from the day of birth, determining such things as:

* education.
* the nature and emphasis of our education institutions.
* the sort of curicula choices available.
* the posible career and social structures.
* the attendant freedoms and responsibilities which may be accessed by that person.

The capacity of an individual to work and be financially independant, is one of the key detirminants of how a person is valued in our socety today.
National economics dictates the career paths available at any point in time. As stated previously, these affect the growth, structure and focus of educational institutes.
For instance, in Australia at present one would not expect an increase in business and economics courses in our colleges because of predictions of a surplus of graduates exceding job opportunities in the next decade.

In this period of a growing sense of a world economy, there is a connectedness across state boundaries, and the perception that the developing world cannot continue to exploit less developed countries, which has not only brought down barriers of isolation, but made countries accountable for their actions both past and present.
It is increasingly apparent that cultures are being reshaped as much by economic dictates as well as by aspirations towards better living and working conditions.
In this period of cultural change, influence and synthesis, that part of our lives spent in recreational pursuits is also being affected.

MEDIA INFLUENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL VALUES

The impact and availability of global communications has meant that societies don't continue to eveolve their cultural systems in isolation. There is inevitably exchange,

influence and resultant aquisition or rebuffle of new or foreign ideas.

In Australia in the last decade, the profiling of successful achievers in all aspects of life has provided indications of how society (or those forces in control of government and media) have provided models for the community to aspire to.

Areas of culture, recreation and sport have had successions of 'pin-ups' or achievers, whose success stories have been able to capture the public imagination.
In many ways sport has been a dominating arena, affirming the Australian ethic of competitive action and sporting prowess. In this the role of the sporting spectator can not be overlooked.
Sustaining the sporting professional and the public forums/venues for the various competitions is an expensive business; one which is intrically enmeshed with commercial interests - seeing business.public and private sectors joining together with the media to promote and make finacially viable, particular sports.

It is often through such promotions that sports become popular, or in some cases such as cycling, enjoy revivals. Others like basketball and soccer have dramatically blossommed, forming national leagues and joining athletics, gymnastics, tennis, golf, surfing and many other sports to achieve world media coverage and become truly international. One of the questions that arises from this is the position of the amateur. Where do they fit into the picture? Is it all part of of a natural tiering of the activity in which the objective is to play profesionally? This may be so in some cases, but clearly for most this is not the answer. Are the goals changed and has fellowship and personnal development been subsumed in a fiercely competitive arena? Does the sporting model apply to the broad spectrum of leisure activities?

Side stepping these questions which require more study, it is perhaps useful to look at other recreational pursuits outside sporting ones.
Leisure activities such as ballroom dancing, fishing,iceskating and sailing to name a few have increasingly come under the influence of the same commercial and promotional methods used for sport.There is also an underlying competitive element which is emphasised.Being best, winning and so on have a value which is weighted significantly, reflecting a trend that has emphasised skilling and the pursuit of excellence well above the social participation. (The implications of this are beyond the scope of this paper).
Many popular activities have experienced the combined effects of national controlling bodies decisions to become

better organised and able to supply members demands for:

* better facilities.
* better services and information dissemination.
* better and bigger competitions.
* communication and exchange with other international bodies.
* increased membership in order to compete for funding and sponsorship.

OTHER CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Movements such as multicultural arts organisations and community based arts groups have recently emerged to reflect the cultural plurality of Australian society and the desire of these sectors to involve themselves in cultural activities. In the multicultural communities' case, we have seen a growing committment from Federal and State Governments in recognition of this diversity and this has tended to put an end to the notion that newcomers to Australia would abandon their traditional values and customs and embrace without question the prevailing Anglo-Saxon ethic.
It would seem that the perception now gathering recognition and support, is that we are evolving as a society - a society in transition, moving away from being a single dominant value system. Our society can be viewed as being in a state of flux, during which our culture is adjusting through contact.appreciation, assimilation and synthesis to the other cultures already in or arriving in this country.

This is already apparent in our learning centres. It has affected social sciences, philosophy, language training, culinerary and hospitality training courses. It has brought alternative approaches to health care, injury prevention and treatment, stress management to name a few areas. The way our society has adopted Tai-Chi, Chi -Gun, Yoga, the work of Feldenkrais to name a few in the field of self awareness, meditation and stress management is an indication of the significant changes occurring in our leisure activity as a result of recent change in our population make-up.

AFFECT OF INCREASING MOBILITY WITHIN (and without) OUR SOCIETY.

This is a key dete rminant of how interactive our communities can be. In fact it has had major affects on the structure and closeness of communities.People are no longer bound to spend most of their time in the area in which they are domiciled. It can be argued that with increasing mobility, there is a corresponding decline in the depth or extent of local interaction and bonding within local communities.

In some parts of suburban Melbourne.(Boxhill, Footscray, Richmond to name just a few of the 30approx.).council and recreational workers are concerned to promote community interaction, responsibility and bonding. The rewards in terms of strengthened small business, loyalty and concern for the commercial future of the district, employment opportunities and the like are fairly obvious. But there are other benefits, perhaps less obvious but which can be quantified. Things like local security, where programs such as the community driven Neighbourhood Watch have brought renewed social responsibility and played on the concept of community control and self determination with some success. Other schemes have placed social and community arts workers into situations as facilitators of community initiatives, developing a whole host of projects: murals, tapestries, oral histories, dance and theatre projects, festivals and so on, all of which have endeavoured to celebrate, integrate and communicate aspects of the diverse cultural heritage that is Melbourne.

Other suburban areas like the City of Knox, have saught to support public programs of craft work, dance, music, public art projects in gardens and parks and to implement policies setting guidelines for environmental enhancement and restoration in all new developments in the area.

Councils have found that by involving community in these activities, establishing ownership,control and responsibility for its own facilities and activities, they save on costs brought about through:
* vandalism.
* irresponsible development.
which can have long term health, social or environmental risks
The City of Knox found that substantial savings have been made in reduced vandalism to bus shelters, since they were painted by community artists.
Community support for civic and public building programs, school buildings and public halls is exemplified at Eltham and Mallacoota Inlet, where focussed community participation to achieve self detirmined needs has yielded some quite astonishing results.

Other aspects of mobility.

(1) Mobility has encouraged diversity in the range of activities available to community members.
It means that a community can easily and regularly import skilled trainers, tutors and facilitators.
It also means that a few hours travel is all that stands in the way of a fibre- maker or basketry person living in Ballarat, from participating in activities at Melbourne's Craft Centre (at the Old Meat Market).

(2) Mobility has meant that particular communities are unable to prevent interaction across their geographic and social boundaries. The effects of this have far reaching ramifications for all cultural groups.
This has been one of the despairs of elders in Aboriginal communities trying to maintain their own cultural value systems in the face of Western values. But unless they can remove themselves from dependence on the economic dictates of the western consumer based society, this is seemingly insoluble task.

ARTS AND ARTS INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Freud once said: ' that as far as artists were concerned, they were on the brink of insanity'. This view of the creative manifestation in our midst could well still be prevalent, in a subconscious suppression of the spontaneous creative side of ourselves. The arts are all too often regarded as being at odds with the rational, and this is furthermore regarded as a bad thing.

There is a long history of the artist and arts workers involvement in using their mediums for communicating social and political change. Many will argue that it is imposible for the artist not to be political.

It is interesting to note some of the public discussion and the debate in scientific communities on 'chaos' theory, where the popular expectation of being able to predict, determine and measure all aspects of our existence is being questioned and reshuffled into broader notions of probability. Where observations of coastlines yeilds information, related to closeups of microsections of rocks on the coast, which in turn yields related information on microsamples of the rocks themselves.
There is a movement for the different scientific disciplines to work closer and more 'interactively', to be less fragmented and isolated ; a concept of unification- getting a grasp of the whole again.

In many ways what is happening at the community arts and recreation level parallels this. We are possibily bringing back to focus (and balance) the wholeness of community practice from neighbourliness, to group activity developing, fellowship and responsibility. The fragments, in this case the special pursuit of a particular activity, while rewarding, has not been a whole picture' for many and it is relating the particular activity to the community which has become an important challènge.

CONCLUSION

One finds the statistics of involvement across the spectrum of recreational activity is a potentially strong and useful

indicator of the way the population weights or values the components of its lifestlye. As I have discussed the reverse is also true, in that these values can and do determine the leisure activity. It is possible to gather information on the way resources and commodities are valued, the importance of community activity, the degree of responsibility an individual feels for their own community, and how much time they will commit to sustaining and developing that community.
From these sorts of considerations it is possible to make comparisons between cultures. Given varying rates of change within different societies especially in economic and political terms, it becomes possible to evolve pictures of where, how and what particular forces will shape communities and their recreation now and into the future.
This presents a vital opportunity to appraise, evaluate that picture and its likely evolution and then make appropriate choices, in order to determine the best future for ourselves.

It is the interconnectedness of all aspects contributing to our cultural identity and life that needs to be stressed. The information we gain on any particular area will contribute to our understanding of the whole.